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Reading Asian Television Drama

Crossing Borders and
Breaking Boundaries

Jeongmee Kim

For Kim Moon-woo,
my father, who I miss every day

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1

International Circulation and Local Retaliation: East Asian Television Drama and its Asian Connotations

Basil Glynn and Jeongmee Kim

In the late 1970s the cultural theorist Jeremy Tunstall pessimistically described how, as a result of cultural imperialism, ‘authentic, traditional and local culture in many parts of the world’ was ‘being battered out of existence by the indiscriminate dumping of large quantities of slick commercial and media products, mainly from the United States’ (1977: 57). However, in contrast to the bleak picture predicted for media rivals of the US, East Asian television production, rather than being pummelled into extinction, is today thriving instead and manufacturing globally popular slick commercial entertainment of its own. Rather than just being a purchasing market for western programmes as a result of a one-way West-to-East flow of programming, East Asia is today producing contraflows from east to west in the format trade,¹ while its products have been leading, according to some cultural observers, to ‘the declining status of American TV programmes on East Asian TV schedule[s]’ (Lim 2008: 36). This increase in international and

inter-Asian cultural trade has provided many Asians with greater cultural access to other countries, and increased confidence and pride in their own culture(s). Asian cultural products as an alternative to 'Hollywood' had for a long time been relatively unimportant in the Asian region (Waterman and Rogers 1994: 98–9), but, in part because of the widespread popularity of Asian television drama, it is fair to say that Asians are now more aware of belonging to Asia and of being Asian.

In contrast to the period 'prior to the 1990's ... [when] ... there was little research published on television in Asia – at least in the English language' (Keane et al. 2007: 20), the contemporary success story of East Asian television drama within East Asia has recently inspired the composition of numerous important and insightful studies that have contemplated the impact of this success on East Asia. Primarily focusing on East Asian audiences, a number of these scholarly works have displayed a tendency to identify commonalities between East Asian countries and East Asian viewers and have discussed these in relation to various aspects of pan-Asianism, exploring such issues as shared Asian femininity, shared aspirations and shared Eastern values as opposed to Western ones.² Such studies have been invaluable in identifying themes and practices in the consumption and construction of discourses and meanings in relation to East Asian television fictions that have crossed national borders. In addition, it has been Asian and Asia-based academic work – rather than western – that has been at the forefront of the critical interrogation and evaluation of what has been happening on the East Asian cultural scene.

However, this chapter will argue that a drawback of such scholarly focus on regional distinctiveness and pan-Asianism is that an incomplete picture has hitherto been presented of the role contemporary Asian television drama is playing in transnational cultural exchange. East Asian drama has recently been breaking out of Asia into non-Asian countries and into the homes, hearts and minds of non-Asian viewers in places as far afield as 'Paraguay, Swaziland, Iran, Peru, and Morocco' (Kim 2011: 126–7). Emphasis

on the Asian-ness of Asian television drama, it will be proposed, has resulted in neglect of aspects of the dramas that are appealing to broad non-Asian audiences. Further, large audiences who ardently watch East Asian drama but who do not fit into very broad definitions of what it means to be Asian have been marginalized. In addition, it will be asserted that an excessive concentration on pan-Asian aspects and the socially positive impacts of East Asian drama have obscured many of the less socially desirable and divisive nationalistic discourses that have surrounded inter-Asian cross-border transmission.

East Asian Television Drama and Pan-Asian-ness

A number of critics have tried to identify Asian-specific reasons for the success of East Asian television drama within Asia. For example, in the introduction to the anthology *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, Chua and Iwabuchi discuss the exceptional success of the Korean drama *Dae Jang Geum* (*Jewel in the Palace*, MBC 2003–4) in several East Asian countries. They point out that historical costume drama is not typically a popular genre in inter-Asian cultural exchange, but attribute the main reason for this particular drama's success to the “close” affinity between the Chosun dynasty [during which time the drama was set] and Chinese history’ (2008b: 6). Whilst this explanation may well hold true to a great extent when accounting for the drama's success in East Asian countries that have a large or majority ethnic Chinese population,³ it carries little relevance when trying to clarify why *Dae Jang Geum* was so popular in the Middle East and Africa where a much lesser degree of cultural proximity exists in relation to China or Korea. The drama itself clearly had an appeal that transcended its Asian cultural specificity when it was very well-received in countries such as Zimbabwe and Egypt. In Zimbabwe, for instance, an essay-writing competition was held by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), the company that broadcast the drama, and it attracted 1,600 essays for three prizes that consisted of autographed

posters of the star, Lee Young-ae (*Donga-Ilbo* 2008). Here was a drama the border-crossing ability of which cannot be accounted for by explanations which focus on Asian-specific features.

The popularity of *Dae Jang Geum* in countries like Zimbabwe highlights one of the key problems inherent in an exclusive focus upon pan-Asian aspects in accounting for the success of East Asian television drama. If a television drama is deemed to be popular in Asian countries for reasons that have been identified as distinctively Asian (shared Confucian values, for example), the drama can consequently only be popular in non-Asian countries for entirely different reasons. Such logic dictates that diverse groups of viewers who are watching and enjoying the same shows have to be doing so for separate reasons because some are Asian and some are not. Therefore, areas of common (or global) appeal and interest, precisely because they are neither specifically here nor there, are often sidelined.

The focus on the Asian-ness of East Asian drama is also problematic because, when looked at in a global context, it is very difficult to argue for its unambiguous Asian-ness. Several scholars have already suggested that some of the larger television-producing nations in East Asia have only become as successful as they are today because they have become adept at translating western-encoded television formats and re-encoding them for Asian consumption. It has been suggested that Japan is one such 'translator between Western and Asian' popular culture (Iwabuchi 2002b: 161). Scholars such as Baik (2005), Cho (2005), Cho (2011), H.-K. Kim (2006), Lee, Keehyeung (2008), Ryoo (2009), Shin (2005) and Son and Yang (2006) have identified Korea as another nation that has been seen to absorb and indigenize Western dramatic output, in its case, as Cho states, through 'shrewd representations of traditional values (Confucianism, family bonds, patriarchy, pure love, filial piety, etc.) via Western plots' (Cho 2011: 396).

Jung-Sun Park (2006) sees Korea's superior ability to interpret Western popular culture into a form that is palatable to other Asian countries as a primary reason for the greater success that Korean

popular culture currently enjoys over Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia. He argues that Korea hybridizes Western popular culture more effectively because it is not yet as Westernized as Japan which, as a consequence of its move towards the West, has now lost much of its cultural affinity with other Asian countries such as China, Taiwan and Vietnam. Jaz Hee-jeong Choi similarly suggests that Korea's ideal balance of 'foreign-yet alike' has enabled it to occupy a more advantageous position as a cultural interpreter within Asia (2008: 151). Eun-young Jung goes so far as to suggest that Korean popular culture is not 'authentically Korean' at all since 'most of its characteristics are transnational and hybrid; and these characteristics involve combinations of local and foreign elements at multiple levels' (2009: 78).

Just as it is difficult to establish the Asian-ness of Asian television programmes, so too are pan-Asian tastes hard to characterize because different forms of entertainment appear to be preferred in different Asian countries. Woongjae Ryoo explains in relation to Korean drama that while *Winter Sonata* in 2004 'became the rage in Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and Uzbekistan', it did not do as well everywhere: 'In Thailand and Malaysia, people devoured *A Tale of Autumn* [aka *Autumn in My Heart*], and Vietnamese viewers were glued to *Lovers in Paris*' (2009: 139). In addition to differences in national fondness for individual dramas, Younghan Cho makes the important observation that even television drama itself is not necessarily at the forefront when it comes to Asian audience preference, explaining again in relation to the Korean Wave that 'the ways that Korean pop culture is consumed differ widely from country to country. In Japan the television melodrama (e.g. *Winter Sonata*) has been the most popular genre whereas in China, K-pop and dance groups have been the most popular. In Taiwan and Hong Kong, historic television dramas such as *Dae Jang-geum* have been the hottest genre' (2011: 392).

In spite of such scholarly observations that there are evident differences between Asian audiences in terms of what East Asian popular culture they like (as well as various assertions that Western

influences play their part in how certain cultural products are received), the existence of underlying pan-Asian appeals and qualities remain key assumptions that underpin much of the study of East Asian television drama. Younghan Cho, for example, is in no doubt that East Asian drama is 'a truly pan-Asian form of pop culture' even though he himself has difficulty explaining why it is (2011: 383). Attempts to identify the pan-Asian nature of East Asian drama have included looking at areas such as Confucian values (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008a), Asian-specific narrative qualities (Leung 2004a), Asian-specific modernity (Chua 2008; Iwabuchi 2002a; Lukács 2010) and Asian-specific viewing positions (Chua 2004; Hirata 2008; Iwabuchi 2005; Ko 2004; Lee, Dong-Hoo 2008; Lee, Ming-tsung 2004; Leung 2004b; Lin and Tong 2008; MacLachlan and Chua 2004; Mōri 2008; Siriyuvasak 2004).

Along the way, numerous theories and terms have been put forward to help account for the transnational inter-Asian appeal of East Asian dramas. Chua Beng Huat suggests that the relatively similar physiognomy of the actors 'undoubtedly contributes greatly to the popularity of East Asian drama series that circulate within the region' (2008: 78), whilst Iwabuchi posits that a sense of 'coequality' between Asian audiences is of crucial importance (2002b: 49). Michael Keane, Anthony Fung and Albert Moran attribute their regional allure to 'the East Asian cultural imagination' (2007: 4). Dong-Hoo Lee suggests the dramas create an Asian 'transnational imaginary space' (2008: 171). Sang-Yeon Sung points to 'East Asian sentiment' (2010: 35), a view endorsed by Eun-young Jung who argues that Korean TV dramas 'touch the right chord of Asian sentiments', and that because they display images of respect for elders and family values they are 'welcomed by many Asian viewers who share similar cultural values' (2009: 75). Sung Tae-Ho, a senior manager at the Korean television channel KBS (Korean Broadcasting System), attributes the popularity of Korean drama to a shared 'Eastern mentality'. Asians, he argues, 'respect the father and mother and a very hierarchical society and Confucianism' (cited in Farrar 2010).

Yet as Lin and Tong astutely observe, it is interesting to note that ‘traditional elements’ that feature in East Asian television drama such as ‘conservative attitudes towards love and sex, female chastity as a natural quality of women, family-orientedness, respect for seniors and the elderly’ are very often identified ‘as being “Asian”’ (2008: 121). While they may well be so, it is important to recognize that such values are also highly regarded in many other, non-Confucian cultures including large parts of the Middle East and Africa. Rather than ‘Asian values’, Anthony Fung puts forward the less Asian-centric term ‘regionally celebrated values’ to indicate those aspects that East Asian audiences identify with (2007b: 281). It is a phrase that is more widely applicable when discussing the pan-Asian appeal of East Asian drama due to its recognition that the values themselves are not Asian-specific but are rather regionally appreciated, allowing for the possibility that other regions can appreciate them equally.

This distinction between ‘regionally celebrated values’ and Asian values is just as important when considering the popularity of East Asian drama within East Asia. This is because a focus on Confucian values only serves to explain East Asian drama’s popularity amongst certain dominant audience groups in certain East Asian countries. Even then, as Son and Yang have argued, Asian-value hypotheses lose much of their ‘validity when one considers that ... not all of the Korean dramas and films that have attracted huge audiences in East Asia emphasize the Confucian values that are assumed to be pan-Asian’ (cited in Cho 2011: 387). Whilst a Confucian focus does facilitate discussion of television drama in the international rather than national sphere, it does not account for the Asian television fandom of non-Confucian audiences such as Islamic and Christian communities within Asia and beyond. Hudson and Azalanshah in this collection, for example, maintain that the focus on Confucian inclusivity has excluded a large proportion of the Malaysian television drama audience and failed to account for their engagement with East Asian television drama.

Trying to conceive of alternative ways to consider mass Asian audiences, Chua and Iwabuchi (2008a) have pointed out that, as well as featuring values that Asians view as significant or traditional, much East Asian television drama also depicts modern daily life in a developing and changing Asia. They have proposed that Asian audiences of East Asian drama eagerly consume images of trendy urban living in metropolises such as Tokyo and Seoul because they perceive themselves as dynamic and already (or becoming) modern. Scholarly consideration of East Asian television drama and its relationship with ‘Asian modernity’ has opened up conceptual spaces for exploring how Asians perceive themselves, their nations and what it means to be Asian. Yet it is an area that has also proven to be as problem-fraught as the study of Asian values because it similarly involves assigning beliefs and attitudes to a diverse mass of people.

Asian Modernity and Its Impact on East Asian Drama Viewing

Mike Featherstone (1995) has argued that because different parts of the world have become modern in different ways and at different times, the notion of modernity requires splitting into different modernities in order to more accurately describe and discuss diverse spatial zones. Amongst these multiple modernities, it can no longer be assumed that the most modern nations lie in the West. For example, the cultural theorists Morley and Robbins (1995) have pointed out that Asian countries like Japan have technologically developed to such a degree that it could be argued that they are now more modern than the West.

While modernization may unavoidably have involved ‘a fundamental element of Westernization’, Ien Ang points out that ‘Asian modernity – as a way of life – is by no means a simple replication of Western modernity’ (2004: 306). Indeed, in some respects it is antithetical to it. Jenny Kwok Wah Lau explains how:

The rapid economic change in the East Asian countries has created a so-called new Asian generation – an affluent condition that is a source of both pride and anxiety for modern Asia. The pride of success in the restructuring of society, and in the resulting capacity to create material abundance compatible with that of the contemporary West, is accompanied by the anxiety of recognizing that such material advancement involves an unprecedented receptiveness toward Western ideas, manifested via financial and technological investments. This is particularly problematic in parts of Asia, such as China, that have struggled fiercely with Western colonization in the past and are trying to establish post-colonial status. (2003: 1)

Asian television drama has become a site for exploring both the pride and the tensions to which Lau refers, in relation to Asian modernity, 'as a way of life'. Through the international consumption of Japanese Asian television fictions, for example, it has been put forward that Asian audiences have come to recognize similarities and differences in each other's Asian experiences of modernization (Iwabuchi 2004c). Numerous scholars (Chua 2004; Iwabuchi 2002a; 2002b; Leung 2004a; Yoon and Na 2005) have argued that the consumption of Japanese drama has enabled Asian audiences to become acquainted with a shared sense of contemporaneity and cultural affinity through consuming commonly satisfying images of an advanced and glamorous Asia. Japanese dramas offer images of desirable living that other Asian countries can either aspire to or take pride in having achieved. Korean television drama has recently been critically understood as the most recent cultural space where further images of Asian modernity can be negotiated (Cho 2005; Chua 2006; Chua 2008; Lin and Tong 2008; Shim 2006a).

However, this critical focus on Asian modernity does raise prickly questions, such as: which Asian countries are modern and which, by comparison, are underdeveloped? Which audience members are living in 'spatial zones' that are aspiring towards modernity and which are living in ones that have attained it? Chua directly engages with the impact upon consumption of a perceived state of

national development by arguing that Asian television programmes and popular culture generally tend to be read within Asia along the linear trajectory of capitalist consumerist modernity with Japan at the most modern end, 'Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore in the middle' and China 'at the rear'. 'Location on this trajectory,' he argues, 'has very significant effects on the attitude of the consumers: Japanese consumers have a tendency to read the pop cultures from the rest of East Asia as representations of "Japan's past", evoking nostalgia for a "Japan that was", while the rest of East Asia has a tendency to read Japanese pop culture as representations of an "imaginable" and "desired" future' (Chua 2008: 89). Iwabuchi is in agreement with Chua when they discuss Japanese television drama specifically, proposing that 'consumerist modernity ... captivates the audience of Japanese trendy dramas in the rest of East and South East Asia, especially those in the developing nations who aspire to improvements in their material life' (2008b: 2).

Placement on the linear trajectory of capitalist consumerist modernity can provide a useful critical tool for gauging how each country interacts with imported popular culture. Yet such positioning is also reductive because it fails to take into consideration other influences of globalization such as cultural fragmentation, particularly at a time when assigning 'national' positions to viewers on a geographically based linear trajectory is becoming more and more problematic because television itself is increasingly failing to address viewers as national subjects. Gabriella Lukács, for example, argues that Japanese trendy dramas have always been less interested in uniting 'the population by interpolating them as members of particular national communities' than in compartmentalizing 'the population into ever more distinct lifestyle collectivities ... by appealing to viewers' individuality' (2010: 4).

Several cultural commentators (Ko 2004; Lee, Ming-tsung 2004; Lukács 2010; Nakano 2002; Siriyuvasak 2004) have argued that from the beginning a major appeal of Japanese trendy drama was its signalling of what was hip and fashionable to non-Japanese viewers. As Lukács points out, 'the viewers in East Asia and South East Asia

who were most keen on watching these shows were style-conscious young men and women who looked to Japan for tips on fashion, food, and design' (2010: 195). Particular placement on the linear trajectory of their own lifespans, therefore, seems to have had just as much impact on many viewers' relationships with imported drama as did the state of development of the nation in which they lived.

Hae-Joang Cho, in her discussion of the underlying appeal of Korean Wave drama, assumes a similar desire – that 'they' wish to be like 'us' – as Chua and Iwabuchi in their appraisal of Japanese trendy drama's popularity. 'In contrast to viewers in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan, who feel a sense of identification as fellow "urban, global, and middle-class" citizens in viewing the "sophisticated and individualistic Korean stars", she argues that 'teenagers in countries like China, Thailand, and Vietnam are enthusiastically consuming the images and messages offered through Korean-style block-busters and soap operas with the desire to enter into that class' (2005: 175).

It is highly debatable that the consumption of such 'messages' is as uncontested as Cho assumes. While in China it may well be the case that 'South Korean dramas are sold and pirated everywhere, and fans adopt the clothing and hairstyles used by South Korean protagonists' (Ryoo 2009: 139), as the *Taipei Times* points out, it is also the case that China has historically 'felt a strong sense of superiority toward Korea since it was a vassal state to imperial China' (2002: 8). Given such competing views of Korea, it does not necessarily follow that adopting fashionable looks popularized in Korean dramas equates with feelings of longing for Korean culture and a concomitant disappointment with Chinese culture on the part of Chinese fans. Jeon and Yoon (2005), for example, maintain that 'there is no indication that local audiences in China feel any sense of cultural inferiority fever' as a result of Korean Wave drama (cited in Ryoo 2009: 149). Cho's assigning of a higher 'class' category to the images presented by Korean popular culture also neglects the fact that certain privileged teenagers within the 'aspiring' countries she mentions would already see themselves as belonging to a 'sophisticated' class due to their elevated status and possession

of cultural capital within their own nations. Both Chua's linear trajectory of capitalist consumerist modernity and Cho's notion of dramatic viewing, as driven by cross-cultural envy and desire, homogenize the complex and multiple influences on audience pleasure into a single consequence of capitalist development.⁴

In contrast to such approaches, K.-H. Lee (2006) suggests that, rather than focusing on capitalist discourse and East Asian countries as markets populated by consumers, it is more beneficial to consider Asian nations as partners in an ongoing conversation. The next section endeavours to do this by looking at various discourses that have recently surrounded the Korean Wave phenomenon and considering whether this conversation between 'partners' has become friendlier or frostier following its inter-Asian circulation.

Korean Television Drama: Pan-Asian or Pandora's Box?

Transnational communication, Ien Ang asserted in 1990, 'affords opportunities of new forms of bonding and solidarity, new ways of forging cultural communities' (1990: 252). Within East Asia, television drama as a means of transnational communication has been seen by some scholars as helping to fulfil this optimistic promise. Woongjae Ryoo, for example, states that the inter-Asian circulation of Asian drama has enabled fans all over the region to 'communicate, understand each other, and develop their new identities' (2009: 144). Outside East Asia, Daniel Dayan's (1998) work has suggested that Asian programming has helped to sustain the ethnic identities of diasporic communities all over the world. Asian television drama can thus be broadly viewed as a globally positive presence in many respects, particularly in relation to inter-Asian relations. It transcends national frontiers and foregrounds international commonality, potentially bringing into being an Asian 'global village'.⁵

The Korean serial *Winter Sonata* is one drama that has been particularly identified as bringing about numerous social benefits following its phenomenal international success.⁶ A survey conducted

with 2,200 Japanese viewers by the Japanese television channel NHK, for example, strongly indicated that it had brought Japan and Korea closer together; 26 per cent of respondents believed that their image of South Korea had been changed by watching *Winter Sonata* and 22 per cent that it had increased their interest in South Korea (Park 2008; cited in Sung 2010: 28). Apparently the interest generated was so great that the drama boosted Japanese tourism to South Korea 'by 40 percent in the first ten months of 2004' (Han 2008: 32). Woongjae Ryoo asserts that *Winter Sonata*'s popularity in Japan made history by 'melting the cultural barrier between South Korea and Japan'; he goes so far as to say that in terms of bringing the two countries closer together, *Winter Sonata* by itself did 'more politically for South Korea and Japan than the FIFA World Cup they co-hosted in 2002' (2009: 140).

As well as being credited with transforming the relationship between Japan and Korea, *Winter Sonata* has also been attributed with profoundly changing the lives of the viewers who watched it. Kaori Hayashi's reception study of Japanese female fans of *Winter Sonata* found that 31.2 per cent of respondents claimed to have found new friends among other fans of the drama and 10.5 per cent declared that it had given them a new goal in their lives (2005b: 165).⁷ Yoshitaka Mōri's study of middle-aged Japanese female fans of *Winter Sonata* revealed that they organized fan meetings, started studying Korean language and culture and 'some Japanese fans even suggested "*Winter Sonata* has changed my life!"' (2008: 131). In Koichi Iwabuchi's audience research many fans of the drama told him 'that they consciously tried to become more caring and gentle to others and respect family members after watching *Winter Sonata*' (2008: 249).

Similar claims have been made for Korean drama's impact on other Asian countries. According to Hyun Mee Kim, for example, Korean drama transformed the Taiwanese perception of South Korea from that of an 'impoverished country' into one containing 'material brilliance' (2005: 193). Sang-Yeon Sung further suggests that this new positive image 'provided an opportunity for Taiwan

and Korea to build positive relationships' following the breakdown of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1992 (2010: 44).

Given its apparently favourable influence on East Asian countries and audience members, it is understandable that the Korean Wave has been critically regarded in some quarters as a welcome Asian alternative to Western cultural imperialism (Cho 2005; Shim 2005). However, in spite of its apparent benefits in forging 'new forms of bonding and solidarity', Korean Wave drama has also met with significant disfavour. As well as being viewed as an alternative to cultural imperialism, the Korean Wave has also been construed as an alternative form of cultural imperialism by many. Discourses in Korea surrounding the Korean Wave have not just consisted of panegyric descriptions of growing bonds of Asian-ness following the positive reception of dramas like *Winter Sonata* abroad. There have also been unpleasantly jingoistic sentiments emanating from the country that relate to national pride and a perceived cultural conquest over Asian neighbours (see Kim 2007). Younghan Cho has condemned the unhealthy focus within Korea itself on Korean ability and even Korean 'cultural DNA'⁸ as reasons for the success of the Korean Wave (2011: 387). Keehyeung Lee has complained that 'conservative cultural critics and some members of the academia' along with 'journalists at major media organizations, government officials and policy makers' have all too readily embraced the concept that 'the Korean wave demonstrates the "superiority" of modern Korean popular culture' (2008: 182). The Korean newspaper *The Chosun Ilbo* provides just one illustrative example of adopting such a position when it stated that 'after having been colonized or overshadowed by its neighbors, Japan and China, for centuries, the country finally has a chance to outdo them on the cultural stage' (English.chosun.com 2006).

Given such jingoistic nationalist dimensions, cultural tensions have been aroused by the export of Korean dramas to some receiving nations and Korean Wave drama has become something of a political 'hot potato' in Asian countries that have found this

alternative to American cultural imperialism equally objectionable (see Yang 2008b). As early as 2005, Jeon and Yoon observed growing sentiments against the Korean Wave in East Asia due to the expansion of its media industries into neighbouring countries. Ryoo points out that imported South Korean popular culture has been of particular concern in countries like China and Vietnam who have long had issues with American-style consumerism, and perceive it as being repackaged and relayed in Korean dramas with their focus on glitz and glamour (2009: 148). In China, the producer of popular epic dramas, Zhang Kuo Li, called the Korean Wave a 'cultural invasion' and urged his countrymen to reject their exports (Maliangkay 2006: 15). He particularly disliked *Dae Jang Geum*, criticizing its content as being 'boring, slow tempoed' with a 'lack of creativity', and accused it of cultural theft by claiming that the acupuncture, cookery skills and herbal medicine presented in the drama as Korean were in fact of Chinese origin. Jackie Chan also joined in the chorus of voices to resist the Korean Wave (Leung 2008: 65–6).

In Japan anti-Korean Wave sentiments have been just as strongly felt. The Japanese actor Sousuke Takaoka triggered an online movement to boycott Fuji TV, the leading Japanese channel airing the most Korean shows, when he announced his aversion to the Korean Wave on Twitter on 23 July 2011. He stated that 'it feels like Korean programs brainwash you, and it really makes me feel bad. Broadcasters need to realize its negative effect' (Soompi.com 2011). A month later:

thousands of Japanese demonstrated against Korean soap operas and other TV shows in front of the Fuji TV headquarters ... The size of the protest – some 6,000 according to the organizers – was roughly the same as the turnout during an anti-nuclear protest following the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. Waving Japanese flags, the protesters chanted slogans demanding the broadcaster to stop airing Korean programs and carried signs saying 'No More Korean Wave'. (English.chosun.com 2011a)

Similar anti-Korean wave activities have occurred throughout Asia. In Taiwan, for example, the Taiwanese National Communications Commission only renewed Gala Television's drama channel license on 28 December 2011 on the condition that it would reduce the percentage of South Korean dramas shown (*Taipei Times* 2011). The Chinese government has gone even further and banned foreign drama outright during prime time (between 7 and 10 pm) (Jang 2012), a move that had been anticipated for a while in Korea and was perceived there as targeted at Korean drama in particular.⁹

Whether growing hostility has contributed a lot or a little, by 2009 there was a noticeable 'decreasing momentum and intensity of the Korean Wave' (Cho 2011: 390) which has been interpreted as a 'decline of its popularity, if not complete demise' (Ryoo 2009: 148). For the Korean government this has become a serious matter because 'Seoul's government has actively supported the expansion of the country's culture industry abroad, viewing it as a soft power vehicle – a tool to boost Korea's reputation in the region' (Kang 2011). The term 'soft power', coined by the American scholar Joseph Nye (1990; 2004) to encapsulate how a nation's influence can be enhanced in a region through improving its image and thus the saleability of its goods, has gained popular currency in international relations. As drama has become an established instrument of Korean 'soft power' within Asia, the Korean government has been very keen to turn around its declining fortunes and re-initiate the Korean Wave.

As part of the solution they have begun 'subsidizing the costs of production of some Korean dramas' (Kim 2011: 126) and taking on a more direct role in overseeing their export. On 31 December 2011 the Korean Culture, Sports and Tourism Minister Kwang-shik Choe 'announced a 2012 policy to expand support of *Hallyu*, to help keep the wave of Korean pop culture surging across its borders' (Lieu 2012). As part of the 2010–12 'Visit Korea' campaign the government also laid plans for a Korean Wave festival, with stars including Bae Yong-joon visiting Japan to promote Korean tourism and appearing in 'tourism-linked commercials to be aired overseas' (*The Korea Herald* 2010).

Such associations of Korean drama with national well-being and Korean 'soft power' have become one of the biggest setbacks that the Korean Wave faces, as it has become virtually impossible to disentangle Korean drama from its promotion of Korea. This is problematic because this latest intertwining of drama and more aggressive government intervention has happened at a time when audiences have most probably become more skilled in recognizing subtexts of television content. In contrast to the mid-1980s when Umberto Eco (1986) felt a form of 'semiological guerrilla warfare' was required on the part of audiences to make them more aware of the ideological content that they were consuming, by 2007, Ien Ang could write safe in the knowledge that audiences were 'in the know' about television's 'textual tricks' and 'more skilful in reading television and the peculiarities of its generic conventions' because 'the pervasiveness of television culture has become an entirely naturalised feature of everyday life' (2007: 22). Rather than Eco's ideological warfare, organized resistance has instead become the response in countries such as Japan, China and Taiwan where undesirable ideological additives to Korean drama's formula have been perceived and opposed.

As long ago as 1818 the English poet John Keats recognized that 'we hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us' (cited in Sitterson 2000: 113) and it would seem the same is true of drama today as Asian audiences have become increasingly able to recognize the nationalistic intentions motivating aspects of the Korean Wave. Ah-young Chung, for example, argues that resistance to the Korean Wave in China and Japan has grown largely as a result of its 'aggressive marketing strategies' and 'nationalistic content' (2009: 16). The negative reaction to the Korean Wave overseas has not gone unnoticed in Korea and some have perceived its decline as potentially catastrophic. *The Korea Times*, for instance, stated that 'if the Korean wave distorts or encroaches on the vitality of other Asian cultures, it would be nothing short of an East Asian version of cultural imperialism. Then, the cultural phenomena would be a mechanism that would hinder peace and coexistence in the

region' (cited in Kim, Ki-tae 2006). Perhaps it is too much to suggest that television drama could lead to such dire consequences. Then again, in Japan, anti-Korean Wave sentiment certainly seems to have aroused as much heated reaction as a potential nuclear meltdown.

Concluding Thoughts

It has been the intention of this chapter to interrogate some of the major critical approaches to East Asian television drama and to raise the profile of the less attractive and less discussed aspects of East Asian television exchange. It has been argued that the numerous critical discourses relating to the notion of pan-Asianism or, as Erni and Chua put it, 'Asian rising' (2005: 6) should not overly obscure the fact that, as well as cultural proximity, cultural anxieties also play their part in how successfully television texts cross borders and impact upon the ways in which they are viewed, embraced or rejected. Within the exchange, alongside the growing willingness to share cultural products and increasing openness to each other's cultures that the growth of cross-border television seems to suggest, there is still the push and pull between cultural commonality and national distinctiveness, past and present international relationships, local and foreign agendas, Confucian and Muslim values, Malay and Chinese identities, and myriad other areas of friction at macro and micro levels. What has also been argued is that there is certainly more to East Asian drama than shared Confucian values, nationally specific visions of modernity or Asian-wide envy of Japanese or Korean lifestyles.

The dramas themselves are drenched with local cultural materials, created in every Asian country, widely diverse in form and content and embraced by non-Asians as well as Asians. There is an appeal to them that lies within aesthetics, storytelling, acting and cinematography, a value that lies in their depiction of their own cultures, their own unique national characters and moments of hilarious comedy and moving tragedy. Yet the dramas themselves

are receding from view in contemporary critical exchange as their social and political dimensions become increasingly foregrounded. Ultimately, what the dramas represent is being overstated in terms of their Asian qualities whilst the dramas themselves are being increasingly overlooked in terms of their artistic qualities. Whereas focus on the former implies that East Asian drama is to all intents and purposes a phenomenon restricted to Asia and Asians, it is the latter and currently under-examined aspects that are at this very moment enabling East Asian television drama to surge across borders, both Asian and non-Asian, all over the world.

Notes

- 1 See Desser (2003) for a discussion of how Hong Kong and Japan have long influenced the West in terms of cultural production.
- 2 See, for example, Cho (2005), Cho (2011), Chua (2006), Chua (2008), Fung (2007b), Kim, Hyun Mee (2005), Kim, Sujeong (2009), Leung (2004a), Lee, Dong-Hoo (2008), Leung (2008), Lin and Tong (2008), Miller (2008), Otmazgin, Nissim and Eyal, Ben-Ari (2011), Ryoo (2009), Shim (2005), Shim (2006a) and Wong (2010).
- 3 Sujeong Kim's research suggests that *Dae Jang Geum* was actually received quite differently even within Confucian countries. Analyzing newspaper coverage in Korea, China and Japan, Kim reveals that the drama was considered quite a challenge to traditional Confucian values in Korea, whereas in China it was viewed as a woman's tale that very much connected the heroine 'with Confucian values and culture'. In Japan, however, it was perceived outside of the context of Confucianism as a lifestyle resource that fans could make use of to 'expand their tastes and activities in everyday life' (2009: 746–7).
- 4 For example, in their study of Asian female viewers in Singapore and Taiwan respectively, MacLachlan and Chua (2004) and Yang (2008a) demonstrate that the viewer's class and social (marital) status within their own culture can also greatly influence audience identification when viewing imported television dramas.
- 5 A term popularized by Marshall McLuhan (1964).

- 6 The popularity of *Winter Sonata* resulted in much strange and wonderful merchandising and drama-inspired behaviour. According to Laura Miller: ‘Yon-sama juice could be bought from street vending machines. The Yonsama Teddy Bear, priced at about US\$ 291, went on sale in 2005 ... *Winter Sonata* Moisturizing Hand Cream, produced by an Australian company named Advance Pharma Developments, sold well all over Asia ... optometrists began marketing frames for glasses that are just like the ones [Bae] ... wears ... Couples held *Winter Sonata* weddings, and there was talk about the *Winter Sonata* Divorce (*Fuyu-sona rikon*), a result of women’s disenchantment with fuddy duddy husbands who didn’t compare well to kind and handsome Yon-sama’ (2008: 19). *Winter Sonata* was also adapted into a musical that toured major cities in Japan (Han 2008: 35) and was made into a cartoon. Other dramas have also been turned into animated cartoons. After the success of the TV drama *Dae Jang Geum*, the lead character Jang Geum reappeared in the anime *Shop Changumu no Yume* (MBC 2006) in which she featured as a 12-year-old girl with an ambition to cook excellent food. Unlike the TV series, however, she had numerous animal companions including an ostrich and a turtle.
- 7 For further discussion of Hayashi’s work see Hilaria Gössmann and Griseldis Kirsch in this collection.
- 8 See, for example, Yoo et al. (2005).
- 9 As early as 2006 *The Korea Times* had warned that China’s State Administration of Film and Television intended to reduce the allowed quota of Korean-imported dramas by half.